

Evergreen Presbyterian Church

Beaverton, Oregon

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June 23, 2024

Sermon Title: No One Knows

Sermon Text: Matthew 24:36-51; 25: 31-46

Matt. 24:36 ¶ “But concerning *that* day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.

Matt. 24:37 For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Matt. 24:38 For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark,

Matt. 24:39 and they were unaware until the flood came and swept them all away, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

Matt. 24:40 Then two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left.

Matt. 24:41 Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left.

Matt. 24:42 Therefore, stay awake, for you do not know on what day your Lord is coming.

Matt. 24:43 But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into.

Matt. 24:44 Therefore you also must be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

Matt. 24:45 ¶ “Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom his master has set over his household, to give them their food at the proper time?

Matt. 24:46 Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes.

Matt. 24:47 Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions.

Matt. 24:48 But if that wicked servant says to himself, 'My master is delayed,'

Matt. 24:49 and begins to beat his fellow servants and eats and drinks with drunkards,

Matt. 24:50 the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know

Matt. 24:51 and will cut him in pieces and put him with the hypocrites. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Matt. 25:31 ¶ "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne.

Matt. 25:32 Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.

Matt. 25:33 And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left.

Matt. 25:34 Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

Matt. 25:35 For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me,

Matt. 25:36 I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'

Matt. 25:37 Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink?

Matt. 25:38 And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you?

Matt. 25:39 And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?'

Matt. 25:40 And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’

Matt. 25:41 ¶ “Then he will say to those on his left, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

Matt. 25:42 For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink,

Matt. 25:43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’

Matt. 25:44 Then they also will answer, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’

Matt. 25:45 Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’

Matt. 25:46 And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Main Point: Jesus Christ is returning to judge both the living and the dead, and his return will be unexpected.

Outline:

1. The Surprise of His Coming (24:36-51)
2. The Purpose of His coming (25:31-46)

Introduction

Today’s reading is the beginning of a new unit. While Jesus is still talking about judgment, he’s talking about a different judgment than the judgment he was just talking about against Jerusalem. Notice, this passage begins with this conjunction, “but.” There is a contrast happening here; a change of subject between verse 35 and verse 36.

Before, in verses 34 and 35 Jesus was telling us about a thing that can be known: namely his coming in judgment against Jerusalem and the Temple. These are things he said we could know the day and the hour of.

In the ESV, verse 36 begins with “but.” It’s probably more helpfully translated as “now concerning.” In the Greek it’s *peri de* with the Genitive. In other places, this same Greek phrase is used to mark a change in subject. And that’s because now he’s talking about something new: and this new thing is what he calls “that day.” “That day” concerning which “no one knows, not even the Son of man.” So this is now a topic shift from God’s judgment against Jerusalem... to the topic of the final judgment in which not just Jerusalem, but *all* mankind will have to stand before God’s judgment seat.

Last week’s passage was about an event that Jesus belabored could be foreseen and predicted. Over and over he said, “when you see these things, then you know that he is near.” “When you see armies surrounding the city... when you see the abomination that brings desolation...” on and on and on Jesus predicted signs that would signal the destruction of Jerusalem and his own coming in judgment against the fruitless temple. He even gave dates saying things like these things will happen within the lifetime of this generation. So he knew when those things before this passage would happen. What had he been saying? That these things can be predicted and understood. And I tried to make the case a couple weeks ago that the events in the first part of Matthew 24 up to right before today’s reading really *were* fulfilled in 70 A.D. when Titus destroyed Jerusalem and tore down the temple.

But today’s reading is very different for one important reason: last week Jesus was talking about an event that he was confident *could* be predicted, that he and his listeners *could* see coming, that you would know when it happens because of very specific markers.

But I want you to notice that many of the things that served as time markers in our previous reading for a predictable event disappear from here on out in the passage. Now that Jesus is talking about his second coming and the final judgment he now ceases to talk about timing or signs.

And this is because, beginning in verse 36, Jesus is now talking about something he calls “that day.” And what he says about “that day” is that it *cannot* be predicted or known when it’s happening – not even he knows it.

If you look today’s passage over carefully from top to bottom. You’ll find no predictions about events leading up to it. No identifiers. No predictions. No signs of when *anything* from here on out will take place. Instead, most of Matthew 24 was about preparing Christians for the Jerusalem judgment, and *all* of Matthew 25 is about preparing people for the final judgment, which he says even he couldn’t tell us the timing of. There are no more predictions like, “You’ll see this,” or “you’ll see that” or “this will take place.”

Instead of prediction, this is a passage about *preparation*. Jesus is insistent that unlike what happened to Jerusalem where there were signs and indications of when it was time to prepare... with his second coming, we need to always be prepared since the time is unknown. We won’t see it coming; won’t know it’s coming; we will be surprised by it. And so we should be preparing for it while we can.

You’ll notice that we’re reading verses 36-51 of chapter 24, and then we also read verses 31-46 of chapter 25. The reason for this is, in the midst of his lengthy passage about the final judgment, Jesus will tell two parables centered around how and why we ought to be prepared for the final judgment. So today we’ll focus on the final judgment as Jesus teaches it here, and then next week we will occupy ourselves with these two parables.

Our outline today is fairly simple, then. Just two points. First, the surprise of his coming. Then second, the purpose of his coming.

1. The Surprise of His Coming (v. 36-51)

First, Jesus tells us about the surprise of his coming in the first part of our passage, verses 36-51.

Jesus uses a series of examples of people who were caught by surprise to emphasize this point that when he comes, he won’t be expected. There won’t be

signs that would set off your feelers. When he comes, he will simply come and everyone will be caught off guard.

He mentions the people in Noah's day who were living their everyday lives as if things were normal and were never going to change. The people who believed that each day would be like the last. Because they believed that nothing would ever change... because they believed that no judgment was coming... they went on sinning and living in darkness. And Jesus says the flood came as a surprise.

He also uses these word pictures in verse 40: "two men will be in the field; one will be taken and one left." "Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one left." He's not suddenly talking about some sort of rapture here where people are snatched out of the world prior to a seven year tribulation or something like that. There's no mention of anything like that here. In the context, what Jesus is giving us here is an illustration of surprise. People will be doing ordinary things, and then it will happen.

You see, nobody grinds at a mill when they think the end is near.

Nobody works in a field when they think it's the last day of their life. The point here is the surprise of his coming.

Notice how he ties his second coming and the judgment together. They are effectively one and the same.

In verse 37 he calls the final judgment the "coming of the Son of Man."

In verse 39 he says it "will be the coming of the Son of Man."

In verse 42 he says the "day your Lord is coming."

In verse 44 he says "the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."

In verse 50 he says the master "will come on a day when he does not expect him."

Notice the shift in how he talks. When he talked about his coming against Jerusalem in the previous section he always mentioned coming "on the clouds" "in the clouds of heaven." When he talked about coming against Jerusalem he was always referring to Daniel 7 and temporal judgment. Here he just says he is coming. *This* is his second coming. Jerusalem's fall was his coming "on the clouds."

But this is something Jesus says that unlike what happened in Jerusalem, we must all “stay awake” for this because *we don’t know* on what day our Lord is coming. Jesus is telling us about the final judgment,

For now, I want to address two issues:

First, consider the surprise of his coming.

Modern life is predicated on this hope – this assumption – that all things will always continue just as they are. That we are in control of our world, and everything is in its right place.

I don’t know what your daily routine is like, but each weekday my family gets up, and during the school year we get dressed, get a bite to eat, make some coffee, assemble our things, and get on the freeway to get to school. And if you ask me dead in the middle of the school year how it’s going, I’m likely to tell you that the days all blur into each other and life feels extremely routine and predictable.

Jesus wants us to know that we deceive ourselves with these assumptions, and that human beings have a history sleeping through apocalyptic events. Yes, we do need to go through everyday life; of course. We need to live our ordinary lives. Routines are not sinful. But James tells us that presumption is.

At the same time, a change is coming that Jesus says will surprise us when it happens. The illusion of the routine will be shattered by an event that increasingly fewer and fewer modern people in the west are actually prepared for.

One of the most common assumptions people have is that the sun will rise tomorrow, and perhaps tomorrow I can repent. Tomorrow I can turn and follow God. Tomorrow I can live for the Creator. But I want to live for myself today.

The problem is, it assumes that tomorrow the sun does rise. It assumes that life will go on like it is. But have you considered that you can’t prove that it will? Have you considered that you don’t really know that? We are creatures in God’s world. We should have some humility.

On the one hand, you have those who just think a judgment is never coming. That’s what you might think of as the sort of secular response.

But there's also a second kind of response to this from Christian quarters that is also a little odd. Every verse of this passage is about making very clear that no one knows when the second coming of Jesus will take place. He says, "Not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only" in verse 36.

But so many Christians say, "Yes. But I've got it figured out. Jesus didn't know, but I do. Jesus just didn't do the right math. If only he knew this number and the sign of the Russian helicopters he could have put a date on it." And for thousands of years Christians have (with the best of intentions) made earnest efforts to out-learn and out-know Jesus on this point – not because they are rebellious or being intentionally proud, but simply because they want to know. They yearn for Jesus to return. They look for signs of his coming.

And yet look at how emphatic this is: "no one knows." No one. The only person who knows, according to Jesus, is the Father.

If you had to guess who might know, you might think that angels might know. Surely they watch the goings on of this world. They know the Scriptures. They've witnessed God's mighty works. They've seen his dealings with man. Surely they know. Jesus says, "No they don't."

But surely it can be known, we think. Surely at least Jesus himself knows. But Jesus says, "Not even the Son." You really don't get more "no one knows" than to say that even Jesus doesn't know.

Let's talk about this just a moment. Jesus Christ was and is the Son of God. He is God himself. He has the divine nature. God knows everything, right? Yet numerous times in the Gospels we see that the incarnate Son of God experienced real limitations.

Although Jesus shares a divine nature with the Father and therefore was fully omniscient in his divine nature, his human nature was not omniscient. Paul tells us in Philippians that he sat aside the rights he had as God. Now, at times in the Gospels he knows more than those around him, but because he willingly lived within the limitations of his humanity, He knew what the Spirit revealed to him, but there were things he said that in his human incarnate nature he did not know.

He had to ask questions of people. He had to learn in the ordinary ways that we do. Stephen Wellum in his excellent book *God the Son Incarnate* says it like this:

“Taking seriously Christ’s deity requires that we affirm that, as the Son, he knew all things, including the hour of his return. In his human nature, however, he knows as a man, which entails that he knows subject to the same laws of perception, memory, logic, and development as we do.” (*God the Son Incarnate*, 455)

So why doesn’t Jesus know what the Father knows? The answer is that for your sake and my sake he made himself low... even as low as you and me... and he did it willingly so that our Savior would really be one of us. Not just a *pretend* one of us. Not a secret superman, but actually a man with a real human mind. Yes he had a divine nature, but he was also a real man.

[gospel application] Let me see if I can help you see why it had to be like this: because of sin, human beings all deserve to die. And if we’re ever to be saved, what we need is not for Superman to come and flex his muscles and lift the car of sin off of us. What we need is for someone to come and live among the guilty and the weak, and instead of flexing and showing strength, we needed a Savior who would take on our weakness, and take on our pain, and take on the corruptions of this world. And we needed that because it’s what we deserved.

But what Jesus brings is something different. Unlike us, he had no sin. Unlike us he had no stain. Unlike us there was nothing in him that deserved condemnation or judgment from God. And this is what is so simultaneously unjust and gracious all at once: he willingly – for you and for me – said, “I’ll endure what they deserve.” And he stood in for us and he represented us. He couldn’t do that if he was just pretending to be a man. He couldn’t do that if he was secretly not really a man or a different kind of a man. We needed him to truly be one of us. And so he did not know the day or hour of his return, because he made himself low in service to you and me.

And this is the gospel. It’s simple: believe in Christ and confess your sin and he will give you the peace with God that he also had.

That peace that you've never been able to make for yourself? He'll give it to you, because he was punished for his peoples' sins when it should have been them. Jesus says, "Believe in me and confess your sins, and you'll be saved." You can have it right now. And you never have to fear the second coming of Jesus.

Our Savior is a man. And he remains a man, though now high and exalted to the right hand of the Father. He is glorified now. But he is still a man. To quote Rabbi John Duncan, "the dust of earth now sits on the throne of the universe."

Why didn't he know when he'd return? Because he loves you. He didn't know because **you needed him not to know**. He didn't know because he made himself low for you. That's why.

The second coming of Jesus is a surprise, says Jesus. And as we'll see next week, he wants us to be prepared for that coming.

2. The Purpose of His Coming (v. 31-46)

Second, Jesus tells us about the purpose of his coming in the second part of our passage, chapter 25 verses 31-46.

If you turn to the next chapter, you skip over the two parables Jesus tells about preparing for the second coming, Jesus brings us to the purpose of it all. Why is he coming back? What's he doing? Just paying a visit? Sight seeing?

No. Look at verse 31.

"When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left."

What is he preparing us for? For this.

Why is he coming? To do this. The purpose of his coming is judgment. Not a popular idea, but something Jesus taught explicitly.

He will come in a way that surprises. And all nations will stand before him. The book of Revelation tells us that in this moment “the books will be opened.” The record of our lives will be consulted, and he will judge us.

Jesus uses the example of sorting sheep and goats. A sheep is not a goat, and a goat is not a sheep. You are either one or the other.

But how will he tell the redeemed and the unredeemed apart? Part of the way you tell is by the fruit that came from your life. The fruit is the visible evidence of who you are and what you did.

In this case, Jesus talks about what the sheep are like. What are the sheep like, according to Jesus?

We'll look at verse 35:

The sheep had changed hearts and so fed the hungry. They gave water to the thirsty.

The sheep clothed the helpless and visited the prisoner and the lonely person.

The sheep treated the stranger like he belonged.

What kind of a person closes their heart to such people, according to Jesus? Someone who has never tasted of the grace of Jesus. Someone who has never known themselves to be a sinner who got treated like he or she was sinless. Someone who believes that people must all earn their way and live by strength and power. What kind of person sees the hungry, the naked, the thirsty, and the lonely and shuts their heart off? Jesus says, “A goat. Goats do that. Goats give people what they think they deserve and only what they deserve. Goats give to get ahead and gain advantage. Goats believe that they earned everything they ever got, and that nobody should be giving handouts.”

Does that make you feel convicted? I think that's why Jesus said it. We'll look more at this next week, but he's *trying* to unsettle his own disciples with this lesson. This message is about warning and caution – not assurance. He thinks they and all who come after them will be far too comfortable in this world – far too tempted to make this place home.

This is the purpose of his coming: to tell the truth about all of us. And those of us who love Christ and his coming will “inherit the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world.”

And those who kept putting Jesus off time and time again... “some day I’ll listen. Some day I’ll come. Some day I’ll follow you. Just let me do this and this first. Let me sow my wild oats. Let me get these things out of my system. Let me live for myself for a while...” This person will hear something very different: “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels...Go away into eternal punishment.”

Those are the most horrible words. It hurts me to even speak them. Because many *will* hear them. Oh what a horrible thing to consider. What a horrible thought to think that some of us even in this very room might hear these warnings and think, “One day. One day, perhaps. Let me keep putting it off” And yet when Christ returns like a thief in the night, like one unexpected, there will be no time left.

And yet you know who you are, right this minute? If you’ve heard these warnings, right now you’re like Scrooge waking up still alive on Christmas morning. That’s right, there is still time. There is time to turn. There is time to hear the warning and look to Christ. There is time to repent. Please turn and believe and live.

Let’s pray.